

A MARBLE EMPEROR—ROUNDEL  
OF THE XIIth CENTURY

THE Dumbarton Oaks Collection has recently acquired a marble roundel (Pl. 1) carved with an emperor in low relief on a field covered with an all-over pattern of closely-set quatrefoils. The dimensions of the slab are: diameter, 90 cm.; thickness of slab on the field, 3.5 cm.; height of relief, 0.5 to 4 cm. The stone is a white, closegrained marble, now a light mousy grey on the surface, of a sort found in various parts of the world, including Greece and the Near East. The slab has been broken and mended in several places, as may be seen from our reproductions. The replaced bit in the belt is a part of the original carving (see plate 20).

For several generations, this relief belonged to a collateral branch of an ancient family in Central Europe, a member of which is said to have bought it, about a century ago, in Italy. A roundel of similar design, but showing differences in detail (pls. 2, 3), well known through publication by Schlumberger (*L'Épopée Byzantine*, Tome I, 1896, frontispiece and p. 141), still (November 1940) exists in Venice, set in a wall above and between two doors numbered 3717 and 3718, in a little court or passage known as Campiello Angheran leading from the Church of S. Pantalon to the Sottoportico Paruta. The Venice emperor-roundel goes by this name, Angheran, which however has often been spelt Angaran, in references to this relief.

These two roundels are the only known full-length representations, in stone sculpture, of Byzantine emperors later than the IVth century. Subsequently, the texts often speak of monumental effigies, but we know of none: indeed hardly of a bust or a fragment, except these two happily well-preserved reliefs, the importance of which needs no stressing.

Both the Dumbarton Oaks relief and that in Campiello Angheran seem to us by their style to be products of Constantinople, and to be of approximately the time of Isaac II Angelus (first reign: 1185–1195; second reign: 1203–1204) or of his brother, Alexius III (1195–1203). They may well be loot from the fourth crusade (1204), which brought to Venice an immense amount of plunder, including the porphyry and marble columns, the capitals and the marble wainscoting of San Marco, the precious vessels of the Treasure of that Church and much of the sculpture that adorns its walls.

Before going in detail into our reasons for this attribution, we would advert to the problem raised by the circumstance that Constantinople and the other cities of the Greek Empire (apart from what they may still con-

ceal underground) preserve very little Byzantine sculpture, whereas Venice has an abundance of it. Not all is of strictly Byzantine origin, however. It is probable that Greek sculptors worked in Venice. Italians certainly worked, in Venice and elsewhere in Italy, in a style derived from the Greek, at a time when sculpture was still being produced in the Greek lands, and departed from the Greek style by almost imperceptible degrees, until the original Greek character vanished. In the presence of many a piece of sculpture of Venetian provenance, attributable to the period under review, doubt subsists. A Greek inscription or monogram cannot always be accepted as proof of Greek origin, and on the other hand Latin inscriptions may have been added, probably were added, to some slabs that came from the East. No classification of the Venetian material, based on an adequate analysis of style, has as yet been attempted. The whole subject, like that of certain enamels preserved in Venice, is a remarkably thorny one.

However, we believe there is a strong case for our dating of these two emperor reliefs. Here, as again and again in the history of Byzantine art, recourse must be had to the coins. Now, the *solidi* inscribed ISAAC, and attributable to Isaac II, though of the rough, almost caricatural style of the coins of the time, show an emperor much more like the one portrayed in our two roundels than those on any earlier or later coins. Isaac II is rendered somewhat sack- or bottle-shaped, with sloping shoulders and pop-eyes, and big-scale jewel-ornament on simple, rather stiff, generally tubular or flattish garment-surfaces. Earlier coin-effigies of emperors are more elongated, slimmer at the waist, and have smaller-scale ornament, more clinging, more delicately and naturalistically elaborated and differentiated drapery and jewelry: See Wroth, *Catalogue of Imperial Byzantine coins in the British Museum*, pl. LXIX, 9, 10 and LXX 3, 4, 5 (Andronicus) and our reproductions (pl. 4) of coins of Alexius I, John II and Andronicus.

This bottle-shaped outline, shown on our Paris coin and on the two emperor-reliefs, appears on other late XIIth century monuments, as witness the Monreale mosaics of 1174–1182 (Dalton, *Byzantine Art*, pp. 411, 412) where the archangels in imperial garb are more sack-like still, with hip- and knee-line broader than the line of their sloping shoulders and accentuated in much the same way with broad, stiff, ornamented bands (pl. 5, Alinari, 33299). We can point to no MS paintings certainly of the late XIIth century that closely resemble our emperor-reliefs; we reproduce one (pl. 6) from the Madrid MS of Skylitzes (photo. Millet C. 1271), this part of which seems, on stylistic grounds, to date before 1200. Generally speaking, the tendency visible in the coins is also discernible in MSS attributable to the middle and later XIIth: a growing simplification,

roughness, stiffness, bagginess even, as compared with the longer and more elegant figures, imperial or divine, in dated MSS earlier than 1150.

The ornament of the Dumbarton Oaks roundel also points to the late XIIth century. At the feet of the emperor, there grows a soft, flat, clinging fern-like plant, reminiscent of frondage on Monreale cloister capitals (pl. 7B, Alinari 33315). This cloister, like its cathedral, is datable (Diehl, *Manuel d'Art Byzantin*, 1926, p. 548) 1174–1182, i.e., a dozen years at most before the accession of Isaac II. Its capitals show scale-ornament on the dragons, which we would describe as an all-over drilled pattern, and which recalls the punched out quatrefoil of the emperor-roundels. Such drilled ornament occurs on humbler slabs preserved in walls and museums in Venice and its region. Cf. one, very similar, in the Ravenna Museum (photo. Ricci 291) and also a splendid eagle and lion capital in the outer gallery of San Marco (pl. 7A, photo. Anderson 22596). See also some of the punched detail of a well-known St. Demetrius relief enwalled in the façade of San Marco (pl. 8, photo. Böhm, unnumbered, and Naya 3304). The St. Demetrius relief may very likely have come from Constantinople after the sack of 1204, the Latin inscription having been added later, and there is a strong reason for supposing that the lion and eagle capitals did: they fulfill no structural purpose and were evidently placed where they now stand for their own sake as notable carvings.

In its turn, the leafage and frieze ornament of these capitals from Monreale and San Marco recalls that of numerous steatite carvings, none of them dated, but all probably XIIth, and indeed late XIIth century. Steatite seems to have tended, at least as early as 1100, to replace ivory for carvings, perhaps because ivory became increasingly difficult to obtain (see our plate 9, photos. Giraudon, and Schlumberger's volumes). The St. John Chrysostom steatite shows, on the vestment under the chasuble, a quatrefoil all-over pattern, so roughly "punch-cut" as to make the cross formed by the punch-like cuts the predominant aspect of the pattern, instead of the quatrefoils bounded by them. Quatrefoil all-over patterns occur on Byzantine enamels too: for instance those forming the upper background (Böhm has a photograph of this detail, showing the quatrefoil) of the splendid reliquary, with a full-length figure in relief of the archangel Michael, in the Treasure of San Marco. Thus, the quatrefoil all-over pattern, as on the emperor roundels,<sup>1</sup> exists here and there, but seems to be rare before the XIIth century and as far as we know the late XIIth. For the iconography, cf. the

<sup>1</sup> Similar quatrefoil ornament, though less accomplished, may be found on the border of a beast-roundel of the usual Venetian type that came up in the Castiglioni sale (No. 75) in Berlin, Dec. 1930, and is illustrated in the sale catalogue.



same saint on a mosaic at Cefalù (pl. 10). On the other steatite, St. Demetrius wears a cuirass of scale-armour which is imbricated in an irregular way. This unusual irregularity of pattern somewhat recalls the irregularity of the *loros* ornament on the emperor-roundel.

The carving of the jewelry and jewel-like ornament on the Dumbarton Oaks emperor is more varied than on earlier representations, with much of it on a larger scale; it is most interesting, and most agreeably rich, especially on the opulent *loros* (see plate 20 for a close-up).

A curious, and as far as we know unique feature of this jewelry carving is the way the upper two rows of quatrefoil groups of jewels (alternating with the jewels set in round boxes) in the belt section of the *loros* are carved with a strong diagonal trend. The individual stones forming these quatrefoils are carved, and irregularly carved, in a way suggesting almond shaped matrix stones, such as turquoises. Some of them have a sharp ridge.

All this gives a rich, nuggety, even quilt-like effect, but an effect unusual in Byzantine jewel representation, which almost invariably shows compositions of regularly spaced and profiled rectangles, rounds, ovals or lozenges with various similarly regular settings: plain, claw, twisted or granulated.

Another indication of the date we suggest may be found in the conspicuous place given to large lozenge-shaped stones alternating with ovals. Not that this arrangement does not occur in earlier periods (see plate 11A, a VIth century representation of Anastasius as Consul, on a diptych at the Victoria and Albert Museum). The Byzantine regalia closely followed the traditional norms so amply illustrated in the VIth century consular diptychs. But in most Xth, XIth, and XIIth century ornament there prevails a regular pattern, a sort of grid, or net, or *semis*, of rectangular jewels in a framework of similarly composed pearl borders or compartments. See plate 11B with its detail of the Cabinet des Médailles Romanus II ivory and on plate 4 (upper right), a fine solidus of Romanus III, of the XIth century. Where the scale is tiny, we find regular rounds in a plain rod-like net; see, on pl. 4 (upper center), an early XIIth century solidus of John II, and the same in a lozenge-pattern, with a few pearl-edges, as in the solidus of Andronicus I (lower right), the immediate predecessor of Isaac II. Now, examine the jewelled ornament of the solidus of Isaac II himself (pl. 4, left center), the emperor with whom we associate the Dumbarton Oaks roundel, and note its acute, almond-shaped cross-jewels, with what in some cases look like sharp longitudinal or axial edges protruding at right angles to the field as do those of some of the jewels on the Dumbarton Oaks roundel. These are much more elaborate and fanciful than the corresponding ornament on the Angheran roundel (pls. 20, 21).

Countenance, hair and beard do not help much to identify the emperors portrayed on our roundels. Hair and beard are rather short, a bit more flowing on the Venice effigy than on that at Dumbarton Oaks. The hair does not seem to fall below the nape. Twelfth-century coins throw little light on the imperial coiffure, but they do suggest short rather than long hair, or long-bobbed hair, such as that, so like present fashions for women, prevailing on VIIIth and IXth century coin-effigies (see Wroth, *op. cit.*). Representations in other media are so rare that we are uncertain whether the coiffure shown here and on the coins represents a XIIth century fashion, or whether it continues an imperial convention, less subject to change.

It may be recalled that Roger II, King of Sicily (crowned on Christmas Day, 1130), as represented on a mosaic in the Martorana, at Palermo, and on an enamel at Bari (pls. 12, 13, photos. Brogi 11374, and R. Soprintendenza Antichità della Puglia, Bari) wears his hair long, falling down over his shoulders, much as Our Lord does in representations of the XIIth century and other periods. But this may be a northern and western fashion. See, for instance, the unusual coiffure of St. Nestor, a tall, blond, northern figure in a mosaic in Cefalù Cathedral, of 1148 (pl. 10, upper right).

We also reproduce a few slabs which seem to be of the XIIth century, carved with non-imperial representations, and a remarkable big painting on silk, doubtless of the XIIIth century, preserved at Trieste (pl. 14). The hitherto unpublished marble relief at Caorle, with its Greek inscription, representing St. Agathonicus life-size (pl. 15, photo. Böhm) may be mid-XIIth. Observe the way the drapery of the Virgin adorning the *solidi* of John II is contoured or outlined, with numerous dykes, dams or walls of rounded but regular profile, as in this figure from Caorle. Our close-up of the Caorle head should be compared with that of the Dumbarton Oaks relief (pls. 17, 18). It may also be of interest, for dating purposes, to compare the St. Demetrius slab in San Marco (pl. 8) with mosaic representations of the same and other soldier saints at Cefalù (pl. 10, Anderson photo. 29589, taken in 1930).

So much for the style of the two emperor-roundels and for the affinities which we can discern between them and other works of art, the dates of which are known or can be surmised with reasonable likelihood. Now, we would add a few remarks on questions, other than those of style, suggested by these reliefs.

As far as we know, there is on record no description of the physical appearance of Isaac II or of Alexius III. Nicetas is the main source for their reigns, which were calamitous and were followed by the Latin conquest of 1204. Isaac II had a reputation for magnificence. "His feasts and buildings

exceeded the examples of royal luxury" (Gibbon, Ch. LX). What we know of him is consistent with the suggestion that our roundels, as well as other sculpture preserved in Venice, saw the light in Constantinople during his day.

Whom can they represent? Their sculptors clearly aimed at giving an impression of wisdom and benevolence: qualities of which contemporaries were not aware in Isaac II or in Alexius III. However, the sculptors would certainly wish to make both of them look sagacious and noble. As far as the likenesses of the two emperors go, they may for all we know be Isaac II and Alexius III. Again, they may be intended to represent emperors of an earlier age: Isaac II's imperial ancestors. Now, Isaac II (Angelus) came of an apparently obscure family from Asia Minor. His Angelus grandfather had married a daughter of Alexius I Comnenus. Alexius I and Alexius I's uncle, Isaac I Comnenus, were Isaac II's only imperial forebears. Both were among Constantinople's ablest and most highly respected sovereigns. The upstart Angelus, named after Isaac I (as his brother was after Alexius) may reasonably be supposed to have wished to advertise his descent from the early Comneni, and to have ordered these effigies, the Campiello Angheran emperor, the more venerable of the two, thus representing Isaac I, and the Dumbarton Oaks emperor, Alexius I. The two would have constituted Isaac II's entire imperial ancestral portrait gallery. And this hypothesis would explain why the slabs, having been executed for Isaac II, were not destroyed after the Byzantine fashion by Isaac II's brother, Alexius III, who deposed and succeeded him; they were portraits of Alexius III's ancestors, too. And, immediately after Isaac II's second reign, there came the sack of the City by the Venetians, who may well have carried off these imperial portraits with the rest of the loot, but who may not have wished to display them in the walls of any prominent public building in Venice. It was not so long ago that Venice had acknowledged the overlordship of Constantinople.

We know no representations of Emperors in painting on parchment that help us with the question we are considering. However, asking the reader to remember that we only show them as other examples of XIIth century imperial portraiture, we reproduce one of Alexius I, from MS. Gr. 666 and one of John II and his son Alexius, from MS. Urb. 2, both in the Vatican (pls. 22, 23).

Although the style of the roundels is consistent with an attribution to the reign of Isaac II's predecessor, the able but detested Andronicus I, this emperor can hardly be represented here. On his coins, he is always shown (pl. 4) (lower right) with a long, forked beard of almost Assyrian appear-

ance. Also, it is highly unlikely that, if Andronicus II had been represented, the sculptures would not have been smashed when he was deposed, and Isaac II mounted the throne.

We reproduce two photographs of the Campiello Angheran roundel: one taken about 1928, the other in March 1940 (pls. 2, 3). The 1928 photograph was taken in bright sunlight, which to some extent accounts for the appearance of a dirty crust on the surface of the marble. The softer light in which the later photograph was exposed brings out the relief much better. It will be seen from comparison of these two photographs that, between the two, the wall in which the roundel is set has been replastered. A big iron clamp on the (proper) right side of the roundel disappeared in the process. The surface of the carving is now a soft mousy grey similar to that of the Dumbarton Oaks carving, tending towards green in some places, yellowish in others, but fairly homogeneous on the whole. It may have been scrubbed with a stiff brush when the wall was replastered. Close examination, on the spot, with the 1928 photograph in hand, shows that since that photograph was taken the carving has suffered in places. The present writers have seen boys pelting it with stones. There is (November, 1940) nothing to prevent it from being further damaged. As it is, less now remains of the lower part of the labarum shaft than subsisted in 1928, and an attempt has been made to conceal the harm by unsightly gobs of plaster, which also occur in other parts of the carving.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

We give herewith a list of books and papers in which the Campiello Angheran Emperor roundel carving is mentioned, or illustrated. We do not know of any serious attempt at analyzing or dating it, or any mention of the Dumbarton Oaks carving.

G. Schlumberger; *l'Epopée Byzantine*, Tome I, Paris, 1896, illustrated on page 141, and on frontispiece.

G. Schlumberger; *Mélanges d'Archéologie Byzantine*, 1<sup>ère</sup> série Paris, 1895, page 171. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, II, 1893, pp. 192-194.

O. M. Dalton; *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, Oxford, 1911, page 159.

C. Diehl; *Manuel d'Art Byzantin*, Paris (1925/6 edition), page 653.

S. Lampros; *Empereurs byzantins*, Athens, 1911, pl. 96.

O. Wulff; *Handbuch der Kunstwissenschaft; Altchristliche und byzantinische Kunst*, Vol. II, Berlin, 1918, page 607.

A. Grabar; *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris, 1936, page 21.

H. Schlunk; Review of A. Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin*, in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, Vol. VII (1938), page 353.

J. Ebersolt; *Les Arts Somptuaires de Byzance*, Paris, 1923, page 34, fig. 35.

For photographs of the Venetian sculpture of Byzantine or pseudo-Byzantine style, see Osvaldo Böhm, *S. Moisè*, Venice.



1. DUMBARTON OAKS ROUNDDEL

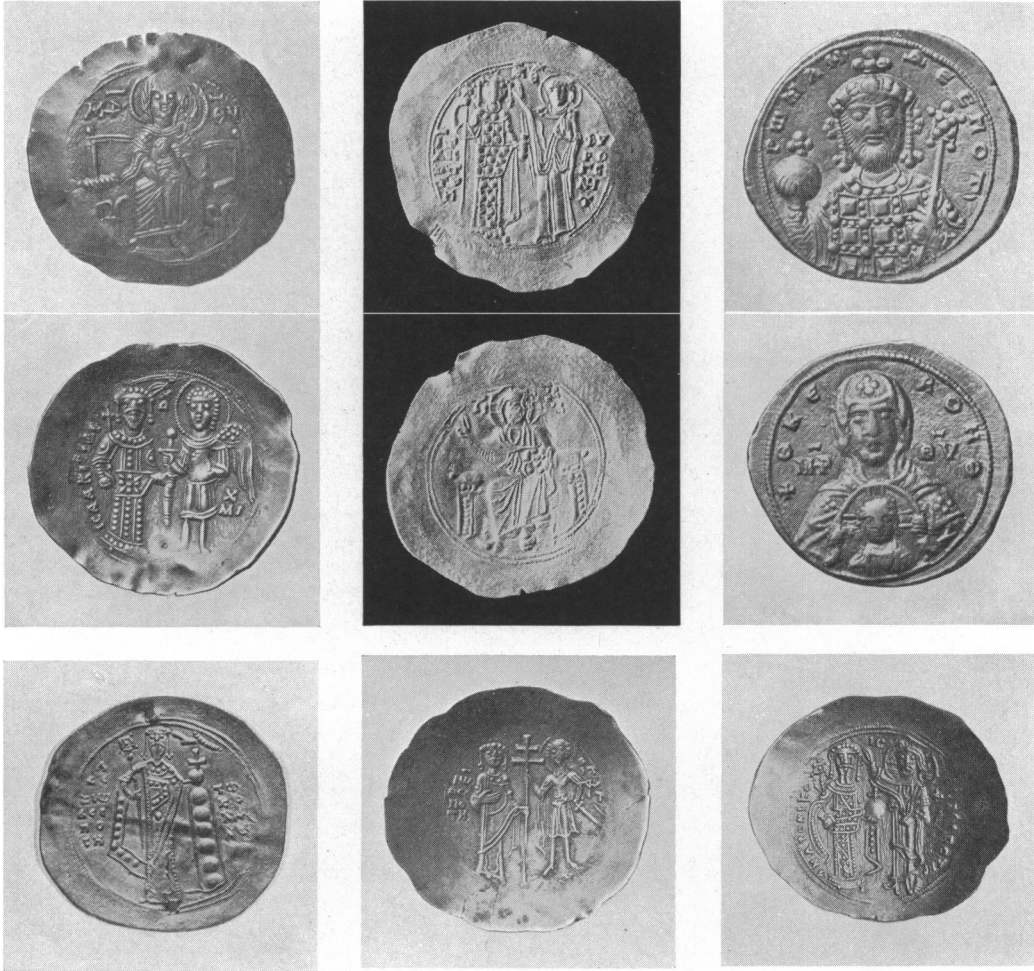


2. ANGHERAN ROUNDEL, 1940



3. ANGHERAN ROUNDEL, 1928





4. COINS

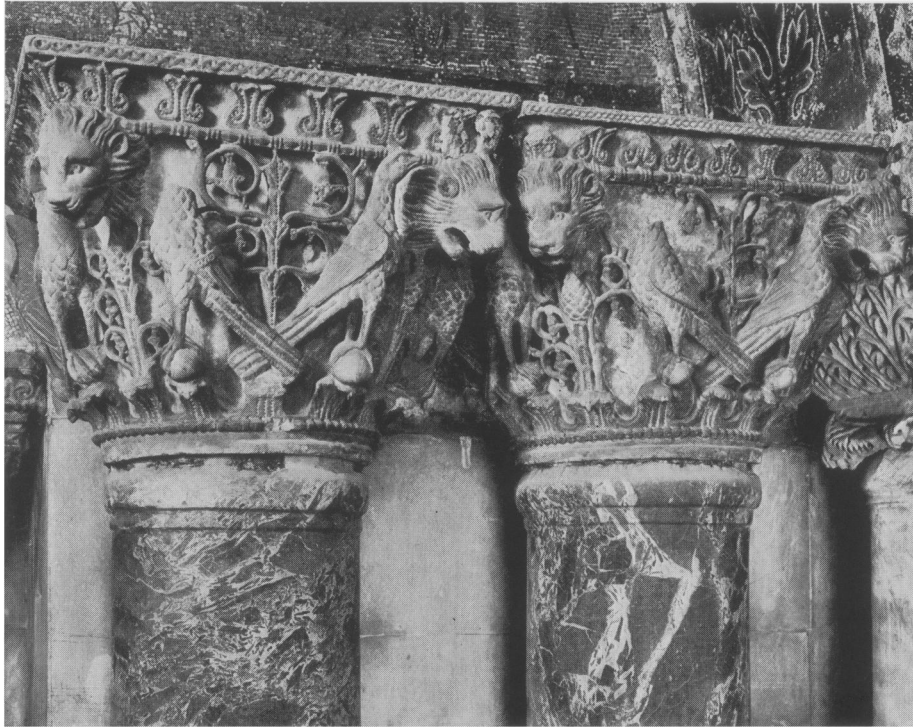




5. MONREALE MOSAIC, ARCHANGELS



6. MADRID NATIONAL LIBRARY, MS OF SKYLITZES



7A. LION AND EAGLE CAPITALS, SAN MARCO

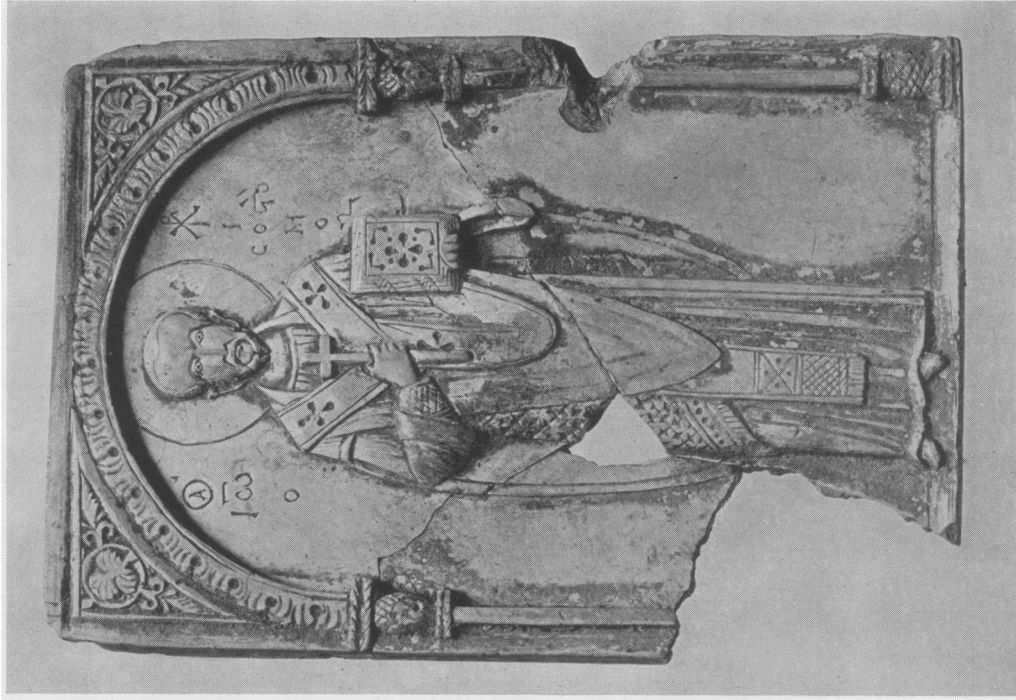


7B. MONREALE CAPITALS

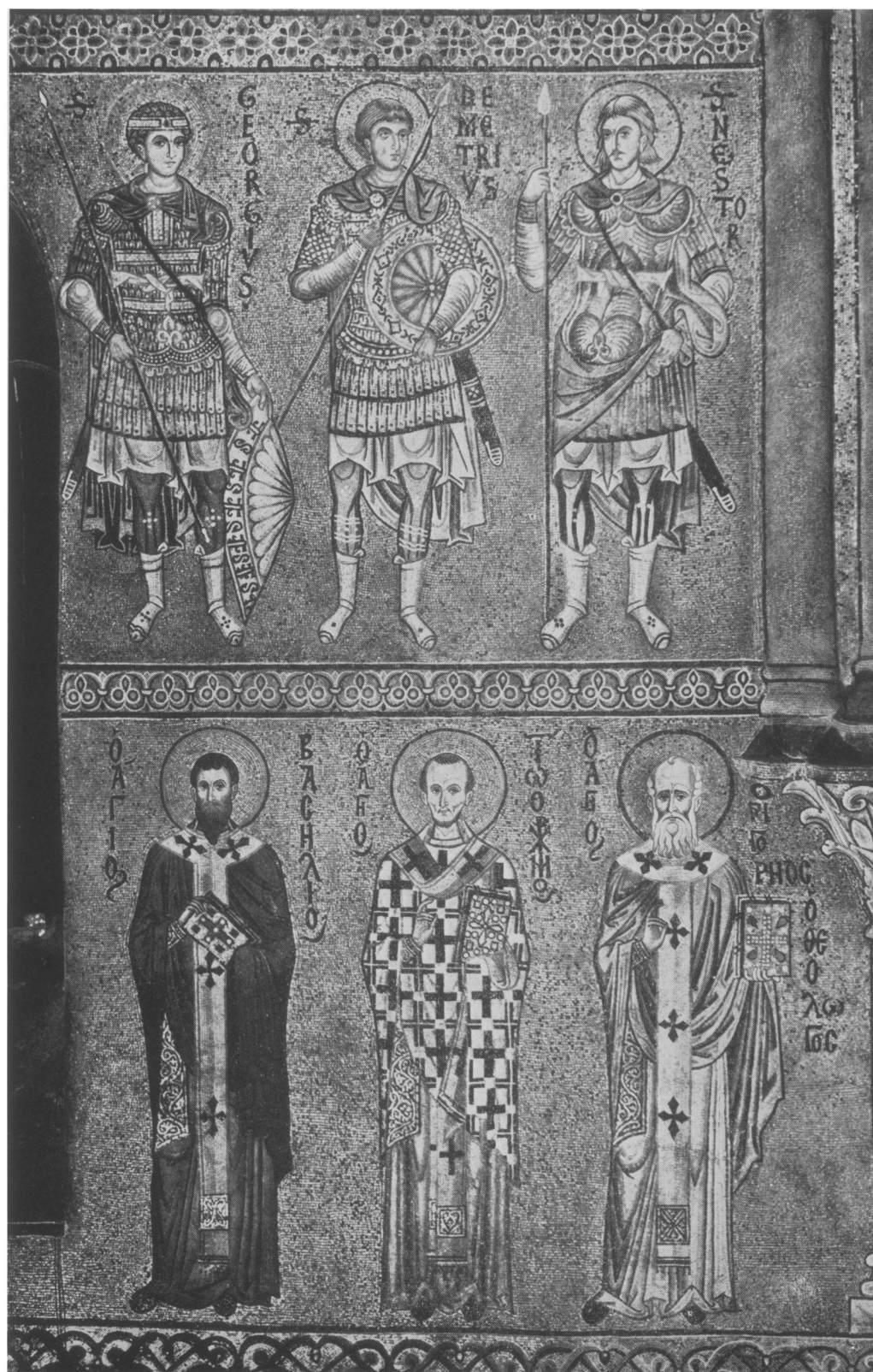




8. ST. DEMETRIUS RELIEF, SAN MARCO



9. TWO STEATITES



10. CEFALÙ MOSAIC





11A. ANASTASIUS DIPTYCH,  
VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM



11B. ROMANUS II IVORY, DETAIL. CABINET  
DES MÉDAILLES, PARIS

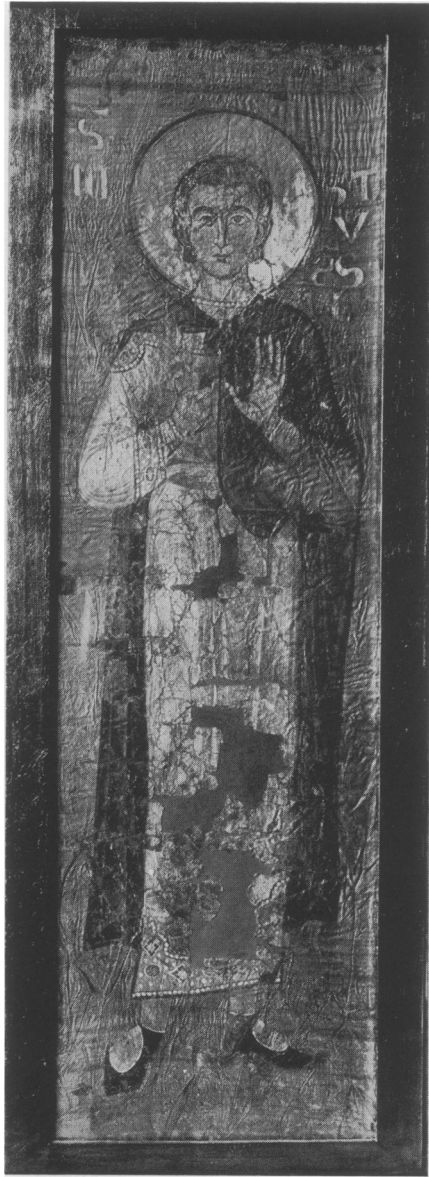


12. ROGER II MOSAIC. MARTORANA, PALERMO





13. ROGER II ENAMEL, BARI



14. PAINTING ON SILK, TRIESTE



15. ST. AGATHONICUS, CAORLE



16. HEAD OF THE TRIESTE PAINTING



17. HEAD OF THE CAORLE RELIEF

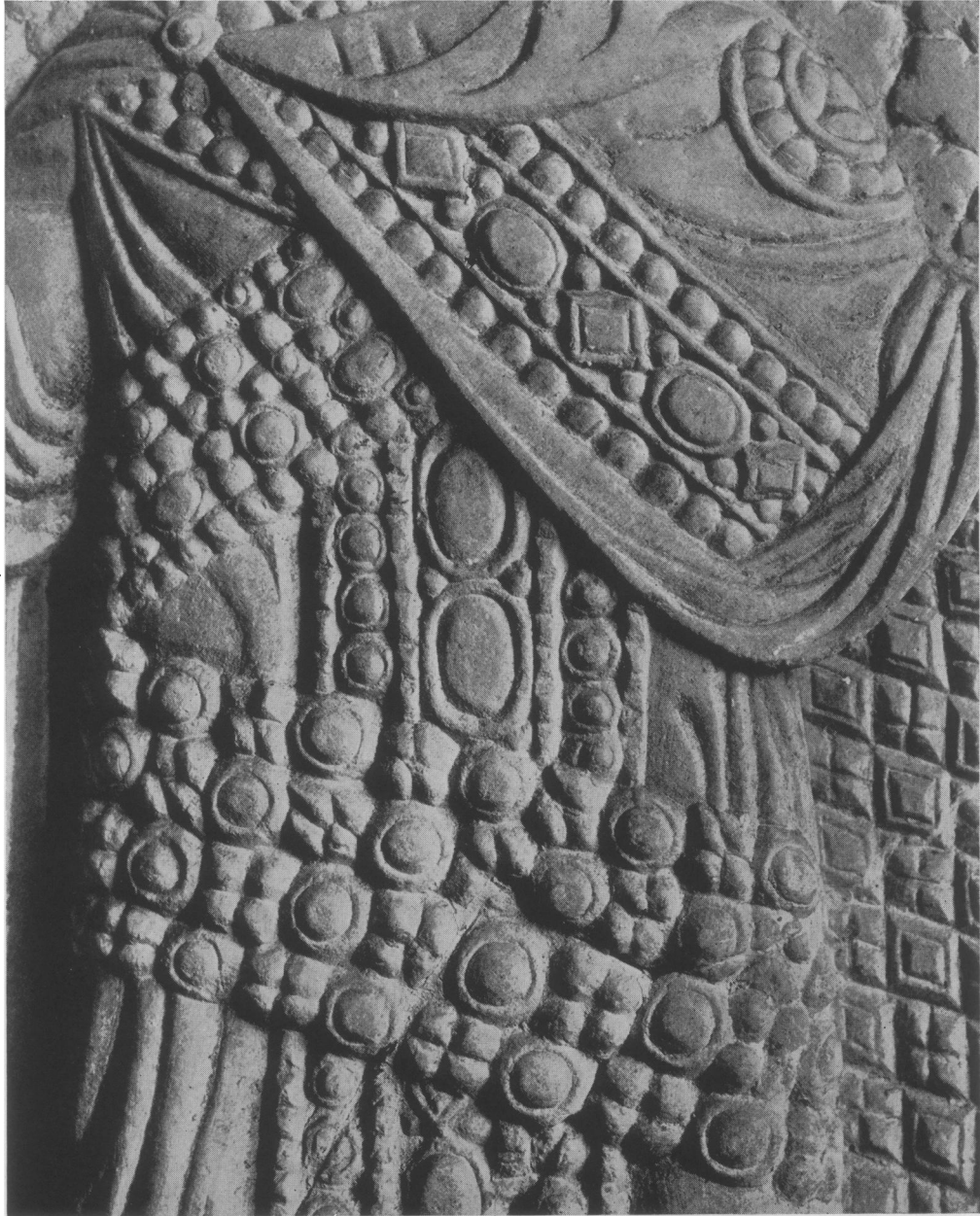




18. HEAD OF THE DUMBARTON OAKS ROUNDEL.



19. HEAD OF THE ANGHERAN ROUNDEL



20. DETAIL, DUMBARTON OAKS ROUNDEL





21. DETAIL, ANGERAN ROUNDEL



22. ALEXIUS I, MS. GR. 666, VATICAN LIBRARY



23. JOHN II AND HIS SON ALEXIUS, MS. URB. 2, VATICAN LIBRARY